

## **SARS Update for Weekly VHA Call to VISN/Facility Leadership**

**05/23/03**

### **Introduction**

While SARS appears to be contained in some parts of the world, reports of transmission in Taiwan are concerning. VA is learning from this event and is continuing to prepare the system to manage SARS cases should they occur.

### **Required Reporting of VA Patients with Suspect or Probable SARS**

It is VHA policy to track suspect and probable cases of SARS (as defined by the CDC) that occur in patients receiving medical care in VHA facilities in order to monitor transmission patterns and estimate disease burden. Therefore, we have issued a new directive on SARS reporting, entitled Reporting Suspect and Probable Cases of SARS in VA Patients, VHA Directive 2003-023, dated May 15, 2003.

Facility Directors are responsible for ensuring that the presence and disposition of suspect and probable cases are reported from VHA facilities to their respective VISN Offices and to local or state health departments. VISN's will forward the reports to the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) and to Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (13).

Please note that initial reports must be made within 48 hours of knowledge of the suspect or probable case. Follow-up reports are made at 2-week intervals after the initial report until the case is ruled out, the results of the convalescent serology are returned, and/or the case is clinically resolved. Because patient names and social security numbers must not be transmitted by fax or electronic mail, the Directive also outlines a process for using Unique Identifying Numbers.

The directive and the forms for initial and follow up reporting have been posted to the VA SARS Internet site (<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/SARS>) and to the Intranet site as well (<http://vawww.vhaco.va.gov/phshcg/SARS>).

### **Other SARS Updates**

Employee information:

- We are coordinating between public health, safety, and occupational health programs in VHA, 10N, and the unions on guidance for potentially exposed employees following the recommendations posted and updated by CDC.
- The Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards is working with the Employee Education System on SARS, including promoting and making accessible the continuing education broadcasts of the CDC.

Veteran information:

- In terms of making our information more available to veterans, the VA SARS Web site is now listed under US Government links on the CDC Web site.

General information:

--CDC's web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars>) remains the most comprehensive source of SARS information.